We just finished a wonderful graduation and thanksgiving service (May 4, 2019) attended by friends of Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) from the US, the Netherlands, Australia, and from several states of India. The graduation service was blessed by our special speaker the Rev. Dr. Davi Charles Gomes, Chancellor of the Mackenzie University, Sao Paulo, Brazil, and International Director of World Reformed Fellowship. Our Strom Missions Lecturer was Rev. Dr. Idicheria Ninan, Professor of New Testament, SAIACS, Bangalore. Friends from India and abroad participated in the program and rejoiced with us at what the Lord had done.

The 50th Jubilee Celebration is a time for celebration, but it should also be an occasion for introspection and reflection. What has PTS done in these last 50 years? Have we used the resources God gave us as faithful stewards? Does it justify our existence and our great desire to take steps into an unknown future? In the following article, I wish to provide a brief historical overview of PTS to trace the development of the seminary over the past 50 years; to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses; and to map out a pathway amidst the missional challenges of the 21st century.

Preamble: The Beginnings: On February 1, 1969 two Presbyteries came together to make a historic decision and an act of faith – to establish a seminary that was to stand on the infallible and inerrant Word of God, to preach the gospel of grace revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ, and to train young men to serve the church in India. The previous day there was a huge debate whether the seminary should be in New Delhi, the capital of India, or in Roorkee, the city famous for its Engineering University, but more importantly, which already had the basic infrastructure to begin operations. Eye witnesses tell us that Christian graces seemed to be absent in the debate, and some even feared that the whole idea of a seminary might come to nothing. Wisdom prevailed and the president called for an adjournment of the meeting to pray for unanimity to decide the location of the seminary. The meeting closed at 11 pm that night and reconvened at 11 am the next day. By daybreak, the Holy Spirit had answered their prayers - the brethren were united in their desire that this new seminary - Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) would be located in Roorkee, in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the rest is history. Classes started on July 23, 1969, with 7 students and 9 teachers, and from these humble beginnings PTS grew to what it is today – an average of about 90 students and 12 faculty members, that has impacted all states of India, and the neighboring countries of Nepal, Myanmar, Bangla Desh, and Bhutan.

It can be safely argued that the founding fathers of PTS were primarily focused on the supreme authority of the Word of God, for all of life and ministry. Without using the word ‘Reformed’ they were reformed in every aspect of being and belonging. What did this mean? It meant a commitment to the infallible and inerrant Word of God and its truths as summarized in the Westminster Standards. Any deviance from this truth met with strict censure from the missionaries when they felt that the any part of the gospel was compromised. These conservative missionaries were willing to bear the taunts and ridicule of fellow missionaries as they dared to be different from those whose missional perspective had undergone some radical change.
**The Contribution of Conservative Presbyterian Missionaries in North India** In the 1960s, post-Independent India was facing a time of ongoing challenges. Apart from the revival of Hinduism and growing nationalism there were also attacks on the church from within, particularly the advent of liberalism and modernism on the mission field, which by this time, had infiltrated American Presbyterian Missions and missionaries in India. The shift was obvious, from preaching of the gospel they turned primarily to social uplift of the poor. One cannot blame these missionaries who were drawn to help the poor and downtrodden in an economically challenged India. The missionary zeal in this direction birthed some commendable institutions in the areas of medicine, agriculture, education, and vocational skill building.

**The doctrinal tussles of the 1920s in America.** The New Testament scholar and Princeton professor, J. Gresham Machen, challenged the growing modernism in the ranks of Princeton Theological Seminary - the bastion of Presbyterian orthodoxy – that soon led to the formation of the Westminster Theological Seminary (1929). When Machen began the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM) in 1933 it was seen as a threat to the established Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church (USA). This led to his exit from the PCUSA, and the establishing of Presbyterian Church of America (later re-named the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in 1934. A further split occurred when Rev. Carl McIntyre, formed the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC). This was church soon represented in India when several young missionaries came under the auspices of the BPC/IBPFM. The pioneer was undoubtedly Miss Louisa Lee, who after 22 years of working with the American Presbyterians, resigned from that Board in 1935 and became an IBPFM missionary and began her work in Kannauj, UP, close to the industrial city of Kanpur.

Several younger missionaries followed the example of Miss Lee and joined the IPB FM. Among these were: Rev. and Mrs. Frank L. Fiol (Kanpur, 1936); Rev. & Mrs. Ralph Cunnigham (Darjeeling, 1938); Miss Elsie Hudec (Uttar Pradesh, 1945); Rev. & Mrs. Richard B Strom (Darjeeling, later Kanpur, 1949); Rev. and Mrs. William Mahlow (Kanpur/Kannauj, 1950); Rev. John L. Dorsey (Kanpur, later Delhi, 1952); and Rev. and Mrs. Bruce R. Fiol (Kanpur, 1966). The North India Presbytery of the BPC was established in the early 1950s and the first Indian pastor to be ordained was Rev. Benjamin Prasad. On January 6, 1965, the NI Presbytery of the BPC seated as corresponding members the following members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and Mission: Dr. John Taylor, Rev. Gordon Taylor, Rev. Johnson Dean, Rev Stanley Ramsey, and Mr. David Fiol. The purpose was to explore how the BPC and the RPC could become closer in fellowship. No doubt this was to help in the formation of PTS. These missionaries would soon come together in 1969 to form PTS. They banded themselves together and fought every sign of apostasy – or what they perceived as such. These circumstances hastened the formation of PTS in 1969 (the above information from the Indian field is from Dr. Richard Strom’s paper presented in November 1987 for the RPC church workers’ family conference.)

**The Contribution of Evangelical Indian Presbyterians in North India** For about 25 years since the inception of the seminary, the missionaries, especially Dr. & Mrs. Richard B Strom, continued to provide the leadership for the seminary. Dr. Strom served as the founding Principal and others served on the Board of the seminary. Though they had hoped for a team of Faculty members trained in ‘rightly dividing the Word,’ it was a slow process. Finding evangelical Presbyterians was difficult, an occasional exception would be evangelical missionaries and local pastors in the American Presbyterian Mission. PTS had a mission to fulfill: to train a generation of pastors with evangelical Reformed convictions to take up the leadership of the RP churches. From the mid-1970s, a small nucleus of evangelical Indian teachers began to supplement the early missionary pioneers like Dr. Strom and Dr. Bruce Fiol. By the mid-1980s it seemed that an indigenous Reformed faculty was slowly taking shape with people like Rev. Isaac Kumar, Matthew Ebenezer and Mohan Chacko joining the ranks.
**Challenges in the Early Decades at PTS.** To be part of the seminary meant to be part of the RPC. The seminary’s vision expanded from training students for the Presbyterian churches in North India, to training students from Presbyterian and other denominations in India and the neighboring countries. This change in vision brought about an influx of students. In the late 1970s the seminary buildings in Roorkee collapsed and PTS was able to move to a campus in nearby Dehradun. In 1987, the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) was accredited by the Asia Theological Association (ATA). This meant that the bar was raised higher in an already intense course of study. Typically, a faculty member would begin his day whenever his first class began (usually 8 or 9 am) and he would finish the day about 9 or 10 pm or later. In those days, the only articles that the faculty contributed were to the annually/ occasionally published ‘Koinonia’.

One significant development in the 1980s was the reintroduction of women students to PTS, initiated by Mrs. Strom who saw the potential that women had to offer. (It is important to note that women’s ordination was never ever the motive for training of women at PTS. Training women in India is necessary because in rural India - which is 70% of the population- only women are permitted to approach women when the men folk are in the fields. This makes it not only necessary, but imperative, for women to be trained.) Subsequently, the Board built the beautiful Strom Women’s hostel on campus with accommodation for 24 women students.

In 1986-87, Dr. David G. Fiol was appointed Principal; the next year Dr. Mohan Chacko was installed as the first Indian Principal. During the latter’s tenure, many buildings were constructed on campus, The Strom women’s hostel (1990); the Academic Centre (1994); the Young-Strom Chapel/Auditorium (1997); the Administrative Block (2000) and the John Calvin Residential Building (2009). Dr. Chacko retired in 2014. The Faculty Office extension was completed in 2016.

**Wider Horizons and Greater Responsibilities** In the 2000s there seemed to be a growing desire to publish books and present papers at conferences on invitation. This coincided with the seminary receiving accreditation for the Master of Divinity in 2000.

PTS has shared the vision of Reformed education by being involved in establishing schools. Board members Rev. John L. Dorsey and Dr. David G Fiol established Faith Academy, New Delhi, and Grace Academy, Dehradun, respectively.

In the 2000s the PTS faculty published several books and articles, among these are: *An Asian Catechism; The Westminster Confession of Faith: In Simple English; What the Apostles’ Believed: A Devotional Commentary*; they also contributed to *The ESV Global Study Bible; the Oxford Encyclopaedia of South Asian Christianity; and Christian Muslim Relations 1900 (CMR1900)* - an online resource jointly published by E. J. Brill and the University of Birmingham. The faculty also involved themselves in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC), and the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF). Faculty members also serve on the editorial committee of *Doon Theological Journal* (DTJ), since its inception in 2004. Several faculty members serve on the Boards of various Christian organizations.

**Contributing Towards the Reformed Witness in India** One of the key roles that PTS has played in recent years is reaching out to Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in India and the neighboring countries. PTS played a significant role in organizing the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship (RPF) in 2001. In 2005, the first RPF conference was held in South India in 2005. Today the RPF brings together all Reformed and Presbyterian churches and institutions every two years for mutual fellowship and learning. The membership has now grown to about 16 different Reformed and Presbyterian denominations and institutions. A typical conference draws close to 100 delegates.
Another key contribution of PTS has been the strengthening of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches all across India and also the neighboring countries, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangla Desh, and Bhutan. PTS has helped train pastors of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) spread over the northern areas. In the North East, ever since the inauguration of the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)** in 1979, PTS has helped train its pastors and evangelists, and its key leaders are PTS alumni. In West Bengal, the **United Church of Northern India (UCNI)** has been partnering with PTS for over 20 years. The **Presbyterian Free Church-Kalimpong**, with affiliated church councils in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, has been sending students for training in PTS for decades. The **Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim (EPCS)**, since the EPCS discovered PTS they have been sending their students to the seminary. The majority of EPCS pastors are trained at PTS. The **Presbyterian Church of India (Reformed) – PCI (R)** was established in 1984 and bears a strong Reformed witness in the state of Manipur today. PTS trains its leadership and has helped the church over the years.

In other parts of India too PTS has been actively involved with training. The **Presbyterian Free Church-Central India (PFC-CI)** has antecedents in the Free Church of Scotland. Placed in one of the most challenging situations in India, PFC-CI sends its candidates for training to PTS. The **Christian Reformed Fellowship of India (CRFI)** works in a variety of fields in the country such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. Their work started only about 10 years ago; their workers are trained primarily through PTS’s Hindi extension program. It is a humbling realization that the number of pastors and evangelists trained by PTS over the past 50 years is a very large number, moreover, their overall constituency is spread all over India would total an aggregate number of several thousands.

**Playing an Important Role in Training Grass-roots Level Evangelists** One of the exciting happenings in the last seven years is the growth and expansion of our Hindi Extension Program. This modular program takes about 2-3 years to complete. Teachers from the seminary, and other hand-picked local pastors, teach these men who are ministering in villages and small towns with little or no training. The testimonies of these men encourage us. Since the program was begun in 2011, over 200 men have been trained. In the year 2018-2019, 44 have completed the program. The current enrolment stands at 117. Enquiries have now come as far as Assam for the same program to be offered in English to their evangelists. We Praise the Lord!

**Impacting Society through Christian Values** Several PTS graduates have established pioneer ministries to uplift the poor and needy through which the gospel is communicated. A few of our alumni contributions are: a children’s home providing board, accommodation, and education for children who otherwise would be exploited for child-labour in Dehradun; a home and school for poor children in Nepal; a children’s home in Himachal Pradesh founded by two women graduates of the seminary; and a pioneering work among visually handicapped persons in Kolkata (Calcutta).

In closing let me outline some of the concerns that we wrestle with as we look at the future. *What is the biggest challenge that faces the Indian Church?* The growing number of youth in India. Fifty percent of India’s youth are below 25 years of age; Sixty-five percent of the country’s youth are below 35 years of age. How can PTS make the gospel relevant to these young people?

*Being Faithful when the temptation is to be Successful.* Success, measured in human terms, for a seminary could be good basic infrastructure, reasonable student intake, not lacking funds, a pool of excellent teachers, etc., etc. We suffer in all the areas mentioned. We struggle to know what should be done to attract more students. Should we change our name? We thought of this seriously since there was an observation that the word “Presbyterian” would put off potential students. After some deliberation we abandoned the idea because the word ‘Presbyterian’ says who we are and what we believe in. We are very careful in selecting our
faculty. Though we sometimes receive applications from highly qualified teachers, we ask ourselves, “Would they be able to commit themselves to what we require from our teachers – an uncompromising stand on the Word, a commitment to preach and teach the gospel of grace, and to be a model of servanthood and service?”

*Keeping a Balance Between Academics and Spirituality* It is always a temptation to drift away from the essential qualities of a Christian minister when we are caught up with academics for the sake of head knowledge. We should read the Apostle Paul’s admonition afresh ‘knowledge puffs up.’ Our aim and desire should be that our students grow both in heart and mind and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way that this can be done except through the teacher becoming a model who could be emulated. Any professor who cannot display the love of Christ and can only display knowledge, falls short of what the Lord wants of His church. This does not mean that we run away from those subjects and ideas that are totally questionable and are opposed to the gospel, rather, we study them carefully to show where they deviate from the truth, ‘*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ*’ 2 Cor 10:4,5 (ESV).

*Serving the Lord, Despite all Odds* Our standards are constantly improving: faculty members have begun publishing their academic work. Our most recent faculty academic publication was an MTh thesis: *Corinthian Prophecy*. Several excellent dissertations are expected to be published in the not too distant future. It is not uncommon for us to get discouraged. We are faced with opposition from without and pressure from within. Last year the state in which we are located passed the ‘Freedom of Religion’ Bill. In essence it means that no conversions should take place from one religion to another. As good citizens of the country we have to adhere to whatever the state demands of us. However, our ultimate allegiance is to Our Sovereign King and to Him we pledge our obedience. He calls us to obey Him. Due to the terms of the Bill we need to warn our students of what they may or may not do during their practical assignments.

*Aiming towards Financial Self Sufficiency* One of our challenges is financial stability. If we do not have a strong support base the task before us will become more difficult. We need to creatively think how we can build up our reserves with sufficient safeguards that would prevent draining of our much needed resources. Perhaps the redevelopment of Lowriston may help towards establishing a fairly strong financial base that would help us in the coming years. With growing restrictions in the horizon this may be a priority that needs to be pushed up front. Perhaps we also need to explore every way that we can improve seminary giving, both locally and from abroad.

Our work has been possible because of the faithful partnership of several institution and individuals. We thank the Lord for each of them. MTW and ARMA in the US, DVN in the Netherlands, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Pray with us for PTS. We think we have invested well what the Lord entrusted to us; we hope that we have been faithful. Thank you for your partnership in the ministry of PTS!